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AUTHOR Hoyt, Kenneth B.
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ABSTRACT

Career education for minority and low-income persons has, to date, been generally a matter of overpromise and underdelivery. To build positively demands that we be willing to look realistically at both promises and problems in three categories: conceptual assumptions of career education; process assumptions of career development; and programmmatic assumptions of career education. Two basic conceptual assumptions of career education which constitute serious operational challenges when we seek to meet the needs of minority and low-income students are that career education is for all persons and that career education is humanistically oriented. As a process, career education follows the model of career development. The model envisions a progressive sequence involving: career awareness, career exploration, career motivation, career decision-making, career preparation, career entry, and career maintenance and progression. Special problems exist for minority and low-income persons in each stage of this process. Three programmatic assumptions of career education which are currently acting as operational deterrents to effective career education for minority and low-income persons are that: career education is a collaborative effort; the classroom teacher is key to the success of career education; and career education is inexpensive. (Author)

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CAREER EDUCATION FOR MINORITY AND LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

Kenneth B. Hoyt
Associate Commissioner for Career Education
United States Office of Education

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Introduction

Career education, for minority and low-income persons, has, to date, been generally a matter of over-promise and under-delivery. The expertise assembled here will hopefully be dedicated to correcting this situation, not to denying its validity through the splendid examples of practice to be presented. Such examples will be better viewed as pointing the way toward progress than in denying the truth of this accusation. If this happens, we should be able to devise a "career education game plan" that will be superior to any particular example presented here. Let this be our goal.

To build positively demands that we be willing to look realistically at both promises and at problems in three categories: (1) conceptual assumptions of career education; (2) process assumptions of career development; and (3) programmatic assumptions of career education. By devoting this presentation primarily to a discussion of these assumptions, the resources to be discussed during the remainder of the conference should assume greater relevance.

To discuss each major kind of assumption fully and completely would require a very large book. Here, only a brief outline of each can be presented. I apologize here to those who are sure to accuse me of painting too bleak a picture. Having apologized, I want to move ahead. That is, in my opinion, if I present a problem that has no basis in reality, you can readily dismiss it. I simply ask that we face those that cannot

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be dismissed.

Conceptual Assumptions of Career Education

Two basic conceptual assumptions of career education constitute serious operational challenges when we seek to meet the needs of minority and low-income students. One of these assumptions is that career education is for all persons. The second is that career education is humanistically oriented. Both assumptions require brief discussion here.

From the outset, we have pictured career education as an emphasis for all persons, at all educational levels, in all settings in our society. We have said that career education should be available to very young children and to adults in the retirement years - to males and to females - to the physically and mentally handicapped and to gifted and talented persons - to high school dropouts and to college graduates - to the rich and to the poor. We have said that ALL persons need to know, understand, and act on the increasingly close relationships between education and work that exist in our society at the present time. The assumption, in my opinion, is sound and must be preserved.

This audience need not be reminded that without unequal resources, equality of opportunity is virtually impossible for those who must start out behind. In a democratic society, "poor"is a relative concept. It is inevitable in that some members of society will have more than others. Thus, in a relative sense, the presence of poor people does not seem evil. What is evil is the assumption that, in generation after generation, lower income persons must always be

expected to come from the same families. To make any concept, such as career education, equally available to all is to guarantee that this situation will be perpetuated.

Our philosophy is dedicated to destruction of the cycle of poverty. Possibilities for doing so will be discussed shortly.

The second conceptual promise of career education, for minority and low-income persons, is that it is humanistically oriented. I recognize how strange this statement must sound. If I didn't think I could defend it, I would not have said it.

I have tried to conceptualize career education around a four letter word called "work". In doing so, I have defined work as follows:

> "Work is conscious effort, other than activities whose prime purpose is coping or relaxation, aimed at producing benefits for oneself and/or for oneself and others."

This definition obviously includes unpaid work as well as paid employment. Its emphasis on "conscious choice" distinguishes "work" from "labor" that is forced on the person or performed involuntarily. Its emphasis on "producing" refers to the human need of all human beings to <u>do</u> - to <u>accomplish</u> - to <u>achieve</u> something that will allow the individual to <u>be</u> someone. Its emphasis on "benefits" illustrates the need we all have to know that somebody needs me for something - that it does make a difference that I exist. Former President Lyndon B. Johnson expressed this need well in a speech when he said "to hunger for use and to go unused is the greatest hunger of all". Career education is dedicated to relieving all persons from that hunger. That is why I say it is humanistically oriented.

It is obvious that career education speaks to what Maslow described as the higher order need for self-actualization. It is equally obvious

that, if one follows Maslow, meeting this need is dependent on meeting the more basic needs of survival, security, love, and belonging. We have translated our humanistic orientation for career education into goals that say we seek to make work possible, meaningful, and satisfying for each individual. In so doing, we, too, have obviously used an ordering of needs approach. That is, work cannot be "meaningful" until it is first "possible". It cannot be "satisfying" unless it is first "meaningful".

For several years, youth unemployment has been approximately three times as great as adult unemployment. Further, unemployment among minority youth has been approximately double than for white youth. Further, unemployment rates for females have been higher than for males. The sickening stability of the statistics takes on added meaning in times when general adult unemployment rates are rising. With unemployment rates in the inner city higher than for the country as a whole, the employment prospects facing minority, low-income youth from inner city environments seem bleak indeed. I have often observed that youth with nothing to do seldom do nothing. It is probably an understatement to say that we face an explosive situation.

The goals of career education can never be met for minority and low-income persons unless major and decisive action is first taken to attack and solve the youth unemployment problem. Survival and security needs, related to work, must take initial precedence over meeting higher order self-actualization needs. It seems both unwise and unproductive to emphasize the personal meaningfulness of volunteer, unpaid work to minority and low-income persons prior to meeting their needs for paid employment. They

already know what it's like not to be paid. Unless there is paid employment available at the time students leave school, career education, for minority and low-income youth, is a cop-out.

At the same time, if career education were to content itself only with making work possible for minority and low-income youth, the goals of career education would obviously not have been met. We would run the great risk of assigning minority and low-income youth to a life of labor while reserving the personal meaningfulness of work for the more affluent. This simply must not be allowed to happen.

Process Assumptions Of Career Education

As a process, career education follows the model of career development. This model envisions a sequence involving, in a progressive manner, (a) career awareness; (b) career exploration; (c) career motivation; (d) career decision-making; (e) career preparation; (f) career entry; and (g) career maintenance and progression. Special problems exist for minority and low-income persons in each stage of this process. Only brief mention of such problems can be made here.

Career awareness aims to acquaint the individual with a broad view of the nature of the world of work - including both unpaid work and the world of paid employment. That world cannot, for most inner-city youth, be seen in its entirety in their immediate neighborhood. More basic, that world is not known clearly to many of their teachers and counselors not to their parents. Problems here are pervasive in most inner-city elementary schools.

Career exploration seeks to help individuals consider possible occupational choices based on their interests and aptitudes coupled with an understanding of the basic nature of various occupations and their requirements for entry. To be effective, career exploration must be more than a vicarious experience. Reading about work is like reading about sex - i.e., it may very well be stimulating but it is seldom satisfying. If minority and low-income youth are to leave their neighborhoods to explore the world of work first-hand, it is vital that they see some persons in that world who are products of low-income inner city neighborhoods. If this cannot be accomplished, career exploration may be more self-defeating than productive for such youth.

Career motivation concerns itself with work values and centers around helping the individual answer the question "Why should I work?" If person from a very low-income family are asked whether they value "making money" or "helping people" more, it should not be surprising if they choose economic over altruistic values. The danger, of course, is in assuming that the individual has no altruistic work values. Money, as a sole motivational base, prevents one from developing long-term self-sustaining motivational patterns. Unless minority and low-income youth can be given such a broader motivational base, they cannot be expected to persevere toward full career development.

One of Shelly's poems contains these lines: "Patience and perserverance made a Bishop of His Reverence." Unless motivation can be diverse enough to produce perserverance, minority and low-income youth will find it difficult to afford the luxury of patience.

Career decision making seeks to help the individual answer three questions: (a) what is important to me; (b) what is possible for me; and (c) what is probable for me? We have been more successful in demonstrating probable failure than possible success. Career decision making, for minority and low-income youth, cannot be based simply on increasing self-understanding and understandings of occupational opportunities. Unless it is accompanied by understandings of how to take advantage of such opportunities, it is likely to be more frustrating than helpful in its results.

Decision making is preceded by indecision. It isn't terribly serious to remain occupationally undecided if your father owns the factory. However, for the minority and low-income youth who have immediate economic needs, occupational indecision is a very serious matter indeed. Unless high quality career decision-making assistance is available, pressures of time will continue to force many such youth to settle for lower levels of occupational aspiration than they should.

Part of career decision-making leads to occupational preparation programs. Problems of minority and low-income youth are particularly serious in this area of career development. It is obvious that long-run problems of minorities are dependent, in part, on more minority persons assuming community leadership roles - and that such roles are, at present, largely being taken by college graduates. Thus, there is an absolute necessity for encouraging more minority and low-income persons to attend college. If career education goals are to be met, college attendance will be seen as preparation for work - not simply for a degree. Too many such youth seem still to be regarding the college degree as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end.

While recognizing and emphasizing the great need for more minority persons to become college graduates, it would be both tragic and unfair to fail to emphasize post high school occupational preparation programs at less than the baccalaureate level. There can be no freedom if the full range of possible vocational preparation choices is not made available for choice. Career education cannot ignore or play down opportunities in vocational education for minority and low-income persons simply because more such persons should be going to college. Instead, the widest possible range of educational opportunities must be made freely available for choice on the part of all minority and low-income youth - along with the financial aid necessary for implementing whatever choices such individuals make.

Finally, the continuing problems minority and low-income youth face in career entry and progression must be recognized. In recent years, a relatively great deal of attention has been focused on helping such youth solve problems of career entry. Problems of career progression and advancement are equally important. If career education does not assume an active role in working with others to solve such problems, it will not have been beneficial, to the extent it has promised to be, for minority and low-income youth.

Programmatic Assumptions Of Career Education

Finally, I would like to comment briefly on three programmatic assumptions of career education that are currently acting as operational deterrents to effective career education for minority and low-income persons. These are: (a) the assumption that career education is a collaborative effort; (b) the assumption that the classroom teacher is key to the success

of career education; and (c) the assumption that career education is inexpensive.

From the beginning, career education has been pictured as a collaborative effort involving the formal educational system, the home and family, and the business-labor-industry-professional-government community. The strength of a given community's career education effort is dependent on the strength of each of these three collaborative forces.

Given this view, problems for minority and low-income students become immediately apparent. The inner city school, when compared with its counterparts in the suburbs, is often seen as poor as its student body. Career education depends greatly on parents to teach positive work values, good work habits, and to assist youth in career decision making. Adults living in the homes of many minority and low-income youth are, at present, not well prepared to accept such responsibilities. Career education counts heavily on the business-labor-industry-professional-government community to provide observational, work experience, and work-study opportunities for students. Further, it depends on the willingness and availability of members of that community to serve as resource persons in the classroom. If the business-labor-industry-professional-government community is limited to the immediate neighborhood of the inner city, a lack of both quantity and quality of effort is almost sure to be felt.

All three parts of this collaborative effort - the schools, the home and family structure, and the business-labor-industry-professional -government community must be strengthened if quality career education is to be provided for minority and low-income youth.

A second programmatic assumption is that the classroom teacher is key to the success of career education. Career education asks the teacher to use the community as a learning laboratory in which students can see career implications of subject matter. It asks that we open up the community to students and teachers for field trips and for "hands-on" experiences. It asks that many persons from the community be brought into the schools to serve as career education resource persons. It asks the teacher to use a project approach to teaching and to emphasize a "success approach", based on individualization of instruction, to the teaching learning process. The many inner-city teachers who, day after day, find crowded classrooms, danger on the streets, and pupils who can't read find it difficult to become enthusiastic about the pleas and visions of career education. The problems of many are compounded by their own lack of experience in or contact with the world of work outside of formal education.

The third programmatic assumption of career education is that it is inexpensive. This assumption is based, in part, on the fact that career education asks neither for new buildings nor for large increases in staff. It seeks to be infused into all subjects rather than being added on as yet another part of the curriculum. In part, this assumption rests on a belief that, if youth are prepared for work and willing to work, they will find work that is satisfying to themselves and beneficial to society.

In the case of minority and low-income youth, this entire assumption appears to be erroneous. It is going to cost sizeable sums of money to give inner-city teachers the kind of inservice education they will need to

work in career education. Parent education programs for career education in the inner-city will require special staff and so cost money. Similarly, field trips and work experience sites for minority and low-income youth cannot be limited to the inner city itself, but must extend out a considerable distance. This, too, will require staff and equipment and so cost money.

Career development programs, for minority and inner-city youth, must, if they are to be effective, be both heavily staffed and equipped with a wide variety of career exploration and decision-making equipment. All of this will be expensive. Finally, the largest costs will be those connected with guaranteeing access to post high school educational programs and to real, bonafide employment for minority and inner city youth. Unless both are purchased, neither will be available and career education will have been yet another hoax society has played on such youth.

Concluding Remarks

In raising these problems career education faces in meeting needs of minority and low-income youth, I, in no way, intend to imply that I know immediate and effective solutions that can now be applied in solving them. At the same time, I find myself full of several beliefs regarding solutions to these problems. I would be less than honest here if I failed to state their general nature.

First, I am convinced that, of all the things needed, money must surely beat, by a very wide margin, whatever is in second place. Even more important, we need other branches of government - the U.S. Department of Labor, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Defense - and many others to join forces in emphasizing and implementing relationships

between education and work in our society. We need the business-labor-industry-professional community to recignize that they, too, have a stake in attaining the goals of career education. Finally, it seems to me that, in spite of our past failures to do so, we need to encourage the churches of the nation to become involved in career education. They have a key role to play in problems involving value decisions and personal judgments.

Second, I am convinced that, in spite of the problems I have specified here, career education can be a reality for minority and for inner city youth. Many examples exist throughout the United States where effective actions are already being taken. The conference program here is filled with some of the better examples. Many others exist who could not be brought here. In no way are the problems of providing effective career education for minority and inner city youth incapable of solution. We need to build on the many good examples that now exist and go forward together.

Third, I am convinced that career education holds great promise for meeting major current needs of minority and inner city youth. If, as a nation, we committed ourselves to career education for such youth, it would pay big dividends both in terms of bringing personal meaning and meaningfulness to their lives and in terms of bringing great benefits to the larger society. Career education is a winner. We should not abandon its implementation simply because formidible problems need to be solved. The best way to begin is to begin. And I think we should.

Finally, I am convinced that, in the absence of a sound and comprehensive career education effort, problems of minority and inner city youth will surely become more complex for them and more difficult for

society in the years ahead. We cannot continue to do what we have done in the past. Career education offers a positive, action program for change It seems to me to be worth trying.